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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SENIOR OFFICIALS ARRESTED AS WARDEN STRIKE
CRIPPLES KENYA'S PRISONS

SUMMARY

¶1. A prison work slowdown has brought severe disruption to Kenya's correctional institutions. The slowdown which was announced on April 25 has resulted in substantial problems in jails throughout Kenya. In his capacity as Minister of Home Affairs, Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka oversees the prison system. On April 26, Musyoka appointed a high level commission to investigate prison employee grievances, which relate to poor pay and poor working and living conditions. On April 28, Kenyan police arrested nine high-ranking prison officials, who are being investigated for dereliction of duty, incitement, and abetting mutiny. According to our Consular section, no American citizens are incarcerated in Kenya at this time. End Summary.

PROTESTING POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

¶2. Prison service officials declared a national work slowdown on April 25 to protest poor working conditions, the lack of payment of danger premiums, and other issues. This work slowdown has paralyzed jails around Kenya. There are reports of prisoners not being fed in some prisons, while in others, senior prison officials had to feed prisoners themselves in an attempt to maintain order.

¶3. On April 26, chaos broke out in Naivasha prison, an hour drive from Nairobi, when correctional officers did not report to work. Inmates apparently refused to return to their cells and then cut off power in the jail. They then tried to break out of prison. Correctional officers responded, but the police had to put a security cordon around the prison to ensure that no one could escape.

¶4. Also on April 26, Vice President/Minister of Home Affairs Kalonzo Musyoka appointed a commission to investigate the striking workers' grievances. Musyoka nominated his predecessor, Moses Awori, to head the commission. Awori had made prison reforms one of his highest priorities. However, correctional officers rejected the Awori commission, stating that his reforms had been slanted too far toward improving the lot of prisoners, at the expense of correctional

officers. Labor Minister John Munyes and Trade Union leader Francis Atwoli also rejected the Awori commission. Whether the present Awori led commission will fare any better is anyone's guess at this point.

15. The same day, striking prison service officials threatened to begin releasing prisoners if their demands were not met. Prisons Commissioner Gilbert Omondi responded that striking workers would be arrested if they refused to restore order in the prisons. On April 28, Kenya Police arrested nine senior prisons officers, who are being investigated on charges of withdrawal from duty, incitement to and abetting mutiny. Among the nine arrested are the Commandant of the Prisons Training College, the Senior Assistant Commissioner of Prisons at Prisons HQ, and the Provincial Prisons Commander of Central Province. Others arrested include the superintendents of six prisons located in Central, Rift Valley, and Eastern provinces.

COMMENT

16. A check of consular records revealed that currently no American citizens are being held in Kenyan jails. Post will continue to follow this issue, which could have serious public safety ramifications if prison security is not restored. End Comment.
RANNEBERGER